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ABSTRACT

This report contains articles that provide guidelines for running board of education meetings and discusses the roles of superintendents and boards in decision making. The articles discuss (1) the public relations value of well-run board meetings, (2) the importance of following good parliamentary procedure, and (3) the preparation and dissemination of board meeting agendas. The responsibilities of superintendents and boards are also discussed. (JF)

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The School Board President

GUIDELINES FOR BETTER BOARD MEETINGS

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BOARD MEETINGS DON'T HAVE TO BE BATTLEGROUNDS

NICK GOBLE, PSBA
Director of Public Relations

Most people want to be treated fairly. If they feel they've had a "fair shake" or if people in authority make them feel they are genuinely interested in their problems, concerns and comfort, most often the foundation has been set for some mutual understanding.

A school board meeting, or any meeting for that matter, should first be thought of with people in mind. That's what a meeting is all about – people. Chances are that poor meetings usually got that way because the planners forgot, or placed less emphasis on, the concerns of people. In other words, they never put themselves in "the other guy's shoes."

Start With Customer Relations

How are people greeted at your school board meeting? Do they wander in and fumble for a place to sit? Or does someone genuinely and officially welcome them "to their school board meeting?" Believe it or not, many school patrons still come to school board meetings with a sense of fear, distrust and thorough misunderstanding of the operational procedures of the board. It just stands to reason that if patrons of the school district are greeted with a smile and offered courteous attention (even if the person has an "axe to grind"), the board and administration stand a better chance of gaining some mutual understanding of the problem, the work and the concerns of both groups.

What's Going On Here?

Along with that warm "hello," people need information. Do your board visitors get an agenda "cheerfully," or is the agenda guarded like Fort Knox? Has someone been assigned to hand them out? Is there a short capsuled statement or background material on each agenda item for informational purposes? Is there some time set aside at the beginning of each meeting to welcome visitors and briefly review how the board conducts its business, and how agenda items are developed or brought before the board?

If the presiding officer prefers to give just a short welcome, the board can rely on an attractive, well-written brochure to cover other points for the public. Such a pamphlet should include important facts about the schools; recite some of the legal "do's and don'ts" of school

boards; and contain pictures and short biographical statements of each school director for easy identification. Other information might include a relief map locating various schools, statistical data and principals' names and telephone numbers. Another important item in the brochure should be the policy and procedures for visitors to address the board, or an explanation on how they can get their concerns on the official agenda. Whatever the information, the brochure should be easy, informative reading and allow for quick digest of the "when, where, why and how" of the board meeting.

Meetings Should Be Comfortable

Not only should comfort be a prime consideration in the planning of an effective board meeting, but so should the physical arrangement. Is the room big enough? Has the ventilation been checked? Will the board and various spokesmen be heard? If not, have arrangements been made for microphones? Are ash trays, paper and pencils available? And think about this: Have you ever thought of holding your board meeting in the school cafeteria where refreshments can easily be served to visitors and board members?

People's comfort and an effective meeting boil down to this. Make sure that a check list is maintained and someone is responsible for providing adequate meeting arrangements, with special attention to the needs of people. Board meetings can be located anywhere. In fact, some districts make a practice of rotating such meetings in various parts of the community. Whatever the practice, think in terms of the people who pay for the schools.

Board Meetings – The Moment Of Truth

All the public relations, coffee, cookies and punch in the world won't help a school board or an administration that hasn't done its homework. Well-managed school districts usually reflect an administrative team that provides an on-going program of information and progress reports to the board. And, responsible board members read them thoroughly, analyze proposals and plans before the decision-making process and, once decisions are made, stick to them.

There should be no surprises between board members and administration. Nothing can break down the business-like image of the board, crack its credibility and sever its working relationship internally, as open criticism and confrontation at public meetings. Board members should not "play" to the audience. Administrators should not allow the board to be caught in embarrassing situations. Through proper planning with the board president and the administrative team, the superintendent can prepare for the unexpected and, at the same time, set the stage for the board to conduct its affairs in an orderly fashion. Consequently, it is imperative that the administration maintain frank, open and continuing communications with the board. On the other hand, the board has a responsibility (through proper procedures) to inform the administration of citizen inquiries, complaints and concerns.

In general, a good board meeting will be bound together in sound board practices and policies, along with a well-constructed agenda and a strict set of parliamentary procedures. Such a framework can allow for disagreement without being disagreeable and provide for opposing viewpoints in a courteous, business-like manner.

A Chance To Inform The Community

Public board meetings do not always have to be battlegrounds between the school system and some disgruntled faction in the community. Properly constructed meetings can allow for exposure to various aspects of the district's educational program and, more importantly, a review of what is happening in the classroom.

Audio-visual presentations on elementary guidance, outdoor education, high school social studies, reading programs and many others, offer an opportunity to inform the citizenry on certain school programs they may never know about. Such presentations can also give a "bird's-eye view" of the various programs of a particular school, as well as district-wide programs.

Another sound practice is to have periodic curriculum reviews inviting department heads and principals to various meetings for specific presentations. Here again is another chance to inform the public (and even board members) about some aspect of the school system. Also during the year, include highlights of district-wide programs such as health, cafeteria, transportation and maintenance services. Reports should be prepared in advance and distributed to board members and other key administrative personnel before their presentation. Another helpful idea is to capsule and prepare short summaries as cover sheets for such reports. In addition, news releases or fact sheets should be prepared on such presentations since they will be a part of the regular meeting and warrant local news coverage.

Working With News Reporters

School boards, like other public bodies, are avidly covered by today's news media. Such was not the case a decade ago. Consequently, educators and board members need to have a clearer understanding of how the press works and its responsibility to inform the public. Here are some tips for working with the news media:

- **Provide agendas, background material and reports to the news media in advance of board meetings. Such a procedure allows the media additional time to study the materials, increases the chances for advanced coverage and, perhaps, more accurate and in-depth reporting.**
- **Consider having the administration meet with reporters prior to the board meeting, such as in the afternoon, to go over various agenda items. Reporters cannot be expected to know all the details of school business and may need this extra insight.**
- **Give reporters VIP attention. Reserve a place up front where they can hear, take notes and have a full view of the proceedings. Provide ash trays, paper, pencils and maybe a cup of coffee. Make them feel welcome.**

- Place name cards in front of board members so that quotes can be attributed to the right person.
- Keep a responsible staff person with the news media to answer questions, interpret information and assist the reporters in covering the meeting. This person can also guide the reporter to possible other feature stories that may come out of the meeting.
- Following the meeting, provide time for the reporter to interview or talk with other responsible spokesmen.
- Make sure that the board and administration are aware of various deadlines facing reporters. In fact, significant items should be placed early on the agenda to allow enough time for the reporter to write the story without undue pressure.
- If reporters can't stay for the entire meeting, make sure they have a contact person and a phone number where they can call for additional information or clarification. This is especially helpful when the reporter is back at his office and working against a deadline.
- Avoid going into executive session or caucus once the public meeting is started. Not only is this embarrassing to the public, but the news media generally will become suspicious of your intentions. Why ask for trouble?
- If the news media doesn't show up for the meeting, be prepared to provide news releases and responsible spokesmen should they call the district later. Better yet, call all the news media in your area and give the highlights of the board meeting. Often, radio stations will tape telephoned reports for later news broadcasts.
- Provide area or local TV stations with 35mm slides of chief spokesmen for the board in case they want to cover a certain aspect of your meeting. TV must have visuals, and color slides make it unnecessary for stations to send an entire crew to your meeting. In fact, they won't send a crew unless you have a major story or controversy.
- Respond to the news media's request for information factually, candidly and as soon as possible. If information isn't readily available, tell them you'll call back. And make sure you do.
- Establish a good working relationship with reporters. Informal luncheons, school tours, feature leads, and sincere courtesy and interest in their problems will go a long way in bringing about mutual trust and rapport.
- Don't hide problems and controversial issues. Schools are public business and news reporters will report something whether you cooperate or not – including the "no comment" answer. It is much better that school spokesmen face up to the issues and answer the questions. Holding back unfavorable news most likely will get the bigger headline.
- Official statements should be made by one chief spokesman and should always be written in clear, concise and understandable language to avoid misinterpretation or misquote. Always have sufficient copies available for the press and the public present.
- Finally, don't be pushy, talk in educational jargon or try to write the reporter's story. Find out what his needs are and help him out. Most reporters want to do their best – fairly and objectively – and will appreciate your sincere cooperation.

Postscript To Better Board Meetings

The path to good boardmanship is a never-ending process and constant learning experience. Orientation sessions, usually reserved for new school directors, should be an on-going experience. This process requires a commitment from the board and its administrative team. Such an arrangement means that the board is willing, within the personal limitations of each member, to take the necessary time and

effort to review the district's educational program. At the same time, the management team must provide the board with a variety of educational programs. These suggested activities may have an indirect effect to better board meetings:

- **Consider board-administrator retreats where local problems and long-range plans are discussed in a two-day meeting. This idea could also be accomplished in a series of evening dinner meetings during the school year.**
- **Invite board members to sit in on various administrative meetings and observe first-hand how internal decisions and problems are ironed out.**
- **Plan visits to neighboring school districts, universities, and colleges to talk with college faculty and administrators or observe educational programs and teaching techniques.**
- **Consider a trip to the State Capital with scheduled visits to the Department of Education, the Legislature and the state school board association offices. And, of course, there should be appointments made with local state representatives and senators.**
- **Encourage board members and administrators to attend statewide workshops and conferences provided by the state school boards association. Here is an excellent opportunity to keep current on the top issues confronting the schools.**
- **Develop systematic visitations to local schools and support offices. Included in such a program should be classroom visitations, invitations to building-faculty meetings, school lunch programs, riding a school bus and observation of various extracurricular activities.**
- **Mail background material regularly on current educational issues and trends to board members and administrators. Magazine articles, research studies, and newspaper clippings concerning state and national developments will expose the management team to other viewpoints and ideas.**
- **Always provide information and agenda items to school directors who are absent from board meetings. A telephone call the next day with a round-up of what happened would be an additional courtesy.**

Go To The People

Board meetings, of course, are open to the public and the board is required by law to inform the community of its meeting place, date and time. Most board members would quickly agree that it usually doesn't take any effort to get people to attend the meeting. But, today, if boards are to receive the necessary understanding and support of public education, they must "go to the people." Consider inviting students, community leaders, civic club officers, staff personnel, other local officials to board meetings. Even invite the local, vocal "critic." Formal invitations, whether accepted or not, may pave the way for two-way communications between the board and the community. If the invitation is sincere, such an effort by the board and administration is an indication to the community and the staff that the board is truly committed to improved school communications.

Finally, make school-community relations an integral part of the school board's planning and decision-making. Remember, schools are "people business" and should be "people oriented." Such a consideration will go a long way in keeping a board meeting from becoming a battleground. ■

Good Board Meetings Are Run By Good Parliamentary Law

The following rules of order are intended to aid school boards in the transaction of smoother public meetings. The items are some of the plainest provisions of parliamentary law. It is recommended that each board make them binding by a vote to that effect.

- A quorum being present, precisely at the hour to which the board stands adjourned, the president shall take the chair, call the members to order and proceed to business.

- Should a quorum be assembled at the hour appointed, and the president be absent, the vice-president or a president pro tem shall serve during that meeting, or until the president shall appear.

- Should a quorum not assemble at the hour appointed, the director or directors present shall be competent to adjourn from time to time, that an opportunity may be given for a quorum to assemble, without which no business can be legally transacted.

- In the transaction of business, the following order shall be observed: 1st, recording the names of directors present; 2nd, reading minutes; 3rd, unfinished business; 4th, reports of standing committees; 5th, reports of special committees; 6th, new business; and 7th, adjournment.

- It shall be the duty of the president at all times, to preserve order, and to endeavor to conduct all business before the board with propriety and dispatch.

- The president, as such, has no casting vote, his right is to vote on every question by virtue of his membership.

● The president may speak to points of order in preference to other members, and shall decide questions of order, subject to an appeal to the board by any two members.

● A motion made, must be seconded, and then repeated distinctly by the president or read aloud before it is debated, and every motion shall be reduced to writing if the president or any members require it.

● Any member who shall have made a motion shall have liberty to withdraw it, with the consent of his second, before any debate has taken place thereon, but not after debate is had without leave being granted by the board.

● The consideration of any question may be postponed to a time fixed or the question may be suppressed altogether by an indefinite postponement.

● A motion once voted down cannot be renewed at the same meeting of the board without the consent of a majority of the members of the board.

● An amendment may be moved on any motion, and shall be decided before the original motion; but no more than one amendment to an amendment shall be entertained.

● If a motion under debate is composed of two or more parts, which are so far independent of each other as to be susceptible of division into several questions, any two members may have it divided and a vote taken on each part.

● When any business is brought regularly before the board, the consideration of the same cannot be interrupted except by a motion -- for adjournment; to lie on the table; for the previous question; for postponement; for commitment; or for amendment.

● A motion for adjournment shall always be in order and shall be decided without debate, except that it cannot be entertained when the board is voting on another question or while a member is addressing the board.

● The previous question cannot be moved by less than three members rising for that purpose, and when thus called, all debate shall be precluded; yet the call for the previous question shall not cut off any pending amendment, but the vote shall be taken without debate on the amendments in their order and finally on the main question.

● A motion for postponement precludes commitment, and a motion for commitment precludes amendment or decision on the original subject.

● A motion for reconsideration can only be entertained when made and seconded by members who were in the majority on the vote on the original question.

● When a blank is to be filled, the question shall be first taken on the largest sum, the greatest number, and the remotest day.

● On questions of order, adjournment, postponement, commitment or the previous question, no member shall speak more than once; on all other questions each member may speak twice, but not oftener without express leave being granted by the board.

● If the previous question be decided in the negative the effect shall be to arrest the discussion and produce an indefinite postponement.

● No member shall be interrupted while speaking, unless he be out of order, or for the purpose of correcting mistakes or misrepresentations.

● No member in the course of debate shall be allowed to indulge in personal reflections.

● If any member acts in any respect in a disorderly manner, it shall be the privilege of any member, and the duty of the president to call him to order.

● If any member considers himself aggrieved by a decision of the chair, it shall be his privilege to appeal to the board, and the vote on such appeal shall be taken without debate.

● Members should not decline to vote on any question without weighty reasons.

● It shall be the duty of the president to appoint all committees, except when the board may decide otherwise.

● The person first named on any committee shall be considered the chairman thereof, whose duty it shall be to convene the committee, and in case of his absence or inability to act, the second named member shall take his place and perform his duties.

● When the president has commenced taking a vote no further debate or remark shall be admitted, unless there has evidently been some mistake, in which case the mistake shall be rectified, and the president shall recommence taking the vote.

● Any two members may require the recording of the yeas and nays on any question.

● The first person recognized by the president as desiring to speak has the right to the floor.

A well prepared agenda ensures that the meeting stays on course. These suggestions for an agenda for local board meetings should be adapted to fit local conditions.

PREPARING THE AGENDA FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

A well-thought and well-prepared agenda is imperative if school board meetings, or meetings of any other official body, are to properly deal with the various issues that come before the body. Carefully prepared agendas become the road map by which the official body recognizes, considers, and acts upon the various items to come before it. The combination of a well-prepared agenda, commonly agreed-upon rules of order and procedure, and a competent chairman (president or vice-president) almost guarantees that board meetings will be productive and pleasant for all concerned.

Here are some tips that should help your board meetings, and the agendas for them.

1. Assign the responsibility for preparation of the agenda.

Generally, the superintendent (and his staff) will be responsible for the development of an agenda for board meetings. But whether it be the superintendent, the school board secretary, or someone else, make sure that the person expected to do it understands that he is responsible for preparing the agenda.

2. Establish a deadline for all items that are to be considered on the agenda.

School board meetings should be orderly, productive sessions where all members have had an opportunity to be briefed, and to research if necessary, regarding all items that are to come before the board for consideration and decision. Therefore, a specific deadline should be established as to when items to be considered on the agenda must be in the hands of the person assigned the responsibility for agenda preparation. (For example, if a community group wants to discuss midget football or pre-school breakfasts, they should understand to whom they must go to get on the agenda and the latest date when they can get a spot on the agenda for a given meeting.

3. Establish a deadline for getting the agenda and supporting informational materials into the hands of board members.

Every board member and other officials – such as secretary, treasurer, solicitor, or authority chairman – who are expected to participate in the meeting should have sufficient opportunity to do their own "homework" and satisfy themselves that they understand the issues that appear on the agenda. Therefore, the agenda and supporting

information should be in their hands a specified number of days before the board meeting.

4. Provide sufficient descriptive explanation on the agenda so that each item is clearly understood.

Even though it is often necessary to provide separate reports or written discussion of agenda items, the identification and explanation that appears on the agenda should be sufficiently clear so that strangers, as well as board members, will be able to clearly identify the item under consideration.

5. Make copies of the agenda available to visitors.

If an agenda has been properly prepared, then it should be in such a form that visitors to the board meeting – not necessarily involved in any portion of the meeting – can easily follow the progress of the meeting. If a stranger can follow and understand the agenda, then, obviously, board members and school officials are better prepared to deal with the agenda.

While it is a goodwill practice to make available to visitors routine material related to the agenda, there is no compulsion or necessity to furnish materials that are intended primarily for board information. The "right to know" and the requirement that public bodies meet in public does not mean that certain kinds of information must be made available to anyone who seeks it. Public officials have a responsibility to safeguard certain kinds of information.

6. Make provisions on the agenda for visitors.

The principal purpose of school board meetings is to conduct the business of the school district in an informed and well reasoned fashion. Therefore, issues requiring board action at that meeting should be a part of the agenda. However, there should be some modest portion of the meeting time set aside for visitors' comments or questions.

At the same time, involving visitors in the proceedings of the meeting should not be allowed to become a situation where the board is unable to move through, and properly deal with other agenda items. Involvement doesn't mean giving the meeting over to visitors. Don't debate with visitors.

7. Hold the chairman responsible for dispatching the agenda.

No chairman should try to "run" a board meeting without having done his homework on the agenda. It is his responsibility to see that all agenda items receive their proper consideration and discussion.

Often, agenda items will require discussion by the superintendent, some other official, or some other board member. The chairman should know which items need discussion, who will discuss them, and what is likely to be the thrust of such discussion. He should not attempt to "make like an expert" on items that someone else has prepared for discussion. A good chairman recognizes his role as one of facilitating the meeting, not necessarily serving as the "star."

8. **Schedule meetings for reasonable periods of time.**

No board meeting is effective if allowed to run over a reasonable period of time. Generally, meetings that continue beyond two hours, or two and one-half hours, have gone beyond the point where well reasoned decisions will be reached. Better to adjourn and convene the meeting again, rather than to run the risk of making hasty judgments. A well planned agenda, properly worked through a competent chairman, will generally avoid this.

9. **Keep addendum items to a minimum.**

A most frustrating experience is to find that the agenda on which the board has done its homework represents only a small part of the business of the meeting because a large number of addendum items have been added since the agenda was prepared. There are occasions when addendum items are necessary. These, however, should be the exception, rather than the rule. If the item can just as well be dealt with at a subsequent meeting, then it belongs on a future agenda, not on an addendum.

Agenda Items For Board Meetings

What does a typical agenda look like? There is no one right pattern. However, there are certain essential items that need to appear on virtually all agendas. For example:

I Roll Call and recording of those present.

II Approval of minutes of previous meeting.

III Approval of bills and authorization for warrants to be drawn.

IV Consideration of items carried over from previous meeting.

V Personnel matters to be considered.

VI Student affairs to be considered.

VII Old policies to be reconsidered and reaffirmed or modified.

VIII New policies to be considered and adopted.

IX Reports –

A. Superintendent

B. Secretary

C. Tax Collector

D. Treasurer (financial statement)

E. Solicitor

F. Others

X Authorizations for conferences, workshops, field trips, etc.

XI Visitors

The following list (reprinted from the Vermont State School Directors Association Newsletter) represents a clear and concise statement of the board's responsibilities to its chief executive.

WHAT SHOULD A SUPERINTENDENT EXPECT FROM HIS SCHOOL BOARD?

- To assist the superintendent with counsel and advice, giving him the benefit of his judgment, business experience, and familiarity with the local school system and the community. Also, to counsel with him on all matters which the board is considering or about which it proposes to take action.
- To delegate to the superintendent responsibility for all executive functions, to refrain from handling directly any administrative details, and to give him authority commensurate with his responsibilities.
- To make all employes of the district responsible to the superintendent, to refrain from any direct dealings with any of them, and to require and receive all reports from them through the superintendent.
- To refer all applications, complaints, and other communications (oral or written) to the superintendent, except when such may come to the board, in meeting, on appeal from decisions of the superintendent.
- To provide adequate safeguards for the superintendent so that he may perform his proper functions on a professional basis. This involves supporting him in his efforts to protect the personnel and the schools from individuals and organizations seeking to exploit the schools for selfish reasons.
- To support the superintendent loyally and actively in all decisions and actions conformable to proper professional standards and the announced policy of the board, and to accept full responsibility for administrative acts authorized by, or resulting from, the policies of the board.
- To hold the superintendent strictly responsible for the administration of the schools, to require him to keep the board fully informed at all times (through both written and oral reports) to review and appraise the results of his work, and to inform him when any methods or procedures do not meet with the approval of the board.
- If, after fair and impartial appraisal and due admonishment, the board is convinced that the superintendent's services do not meet with its approval, to notify him kindly and courteously and as far in advance as possible, in accordance with board policy and the legal requirements of the state, that a change must be made; and to replace him with a carefully selected new superintendent.

This list (also reprinted from the Vermont State School Directors Association Newsletter) outlines what school boards should expect from their superintendent.

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOL BOARDS EXPECT FROM THEIR SUPERINTENDENT?

- Expect him to serve as their executive officer.
- To be their professional advisor in all matters and to recommend appropriate school policies for consideration.
- To implement and execute all policies adopted by the board.
- To keep them fully and accurately informed about the school program.
- To interpret the needs of the school system.
- To present his professional recommendation on all problems and issues considered by the board.
- To devote a large share of his time and thought to the improvement of instruction.
- To be alert to advances and improvements in educational programs, wherever they may be found.
- To lead in the development and operation of an adequate program of school-community relations.
- To participate in community activities.
- To use great care in nominating candidates for appointment to the school staff.
- To recommend for purchase, equipment, books and supplies that are appropriate to the purposes and needs of the system.
- To present for the board's consideration, an annual budget that is designed to serve the needs of the system.
- To establish and operate the financial operations of the school district to ensure adherence to budget provisions and the wise use of school funds.
- Expect him to have the wisdom to recommend the dismissal or non-renewal of contract of a staff member when necessary.

NOTE: If every school board and school board member and every superintendent fulfilled these obligations, many of the problems which occur between school boards and superintendents would be non-existent. Many of the problems which face school districts are probably caused by either the board, or the superintendent, or both, violating such guidelines as these.

CHECK THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

By DR. J. A. KINDER
Superintendent of Schools
Rochester, Minnesota

This article by Dr. Kinder was written for the October issue of the Missouri School Boards Association's official publication.

It is understood that all school boards are different, and that each school board operates in a different setting which, in many cases, is changing constantly. Yet, there are certain basic principles in the school decision-making process which need to be kept in mind by school boards and school superintendents as they go about this thing called decision-making.

This check list is intended to be a guide to the school decision-maker at the school board/superintendent level. It is hoped that the list will aid the school decision-maker to become more sophisticated in the various areas which might be considered when he reviews the process in his district.

School Board Member In-service Training

Check

____ Do you have a training program for the new school board member which acquaints him with the school and his role as a school board member?

____ Do you encourage the veteran school board member to attend school board association meetings at the district, state and national level?

____ Do you have a library available for school board members that contains books, periodicals, magazines, and other reading material that will help keep him up-to-date as to the educational scene in this nation?

Superintendent Of Schools In-service Training

____ Is the superintendent of schools encouraged to attend professional meetings at the district, state and national levels?

____ Are funds budgeted for the superintendent of schools to attend such in-service training programs as are conducted by the National Academy of School Executives, colleges and universities, as well as by various private groups that sponsor training sessions which would help keep him up-to-date in the field of education?

____ Do you have a library available for the superintendent of schools that contains books, periodicals, magazines and such other reading material that will help him keep up-to-date as to the educational scene in this nation?

The Relationship Role Of The School Board Member With The Superintendent Of Schools (Obligations)

____ Does the school board member study and acquire the knowledge of the educational processes which lead to a successful school program?

____ Does the school board member demonstrate the application of knowledge of these processes in the decisions which affect the educational program of the schools?

____ Does the school board, along with the superintendent of schools, develop a workable philosophy for the school system which they review at least annually, and which becomes the basis for operation of the school budget and the total operation of the school district?

____ Does the school board member assume an influential role of educational leadership in the school district by working with and helping the lay public understand their schools?

The Relationship Role Of The Superintendent Of Schools With The Board Of Education (Obligations)

____ Does the superintendent of schools keep the board of education informed?

____ Does the superintendent of schools prepare the board agenda in consultation with the school board chairman, stating items to be considered, supplemented with comprehensive background information necessary for the board to make decisions in light of good educational practice?

____ Does the superintendent of schools develop the procedures necessary to interpret and implement the decisions of the board of education?

Decision-making

____ Do the people involved in the decision-making process understand that the decision **not** to make a decision is just as important as the decision to make a decision?

____ Do the people involved in the decision-making process understand that every decision made involves consequences, and that these must be weighed carefully before the decision is finally made?

____ Do the people involved in the decision-making process understand the limits under which decisions are made at their level?

____ Do your policies indicate who is to make a decision and the scope of the decision, as well as to give some information as to how the decision is to be made?

The Communications Instrument

____ Does the physical design of the instrument lend itself to good indexing procedures?

____ Does the first portion of the instrument contain an order of material so the busy school board member can tell at a glance what he must and/or wants to read?

____ Does the communications instrument contain a letter from the superintendent of schools, bringing the school board members up-to-date on his most recent activities and concerns?

____ Does the communications instrument contain a proposed agenda prepared by the superintendent of schools, his staff and the chairman of the board of education?

____ Is sufficient information attached so that the board of education may know and understand the implication of each agenda item?

____ In providing supporting information for each agenda item, does it contain such things as a history of the problem, possible alternatives, financial implications and administrative recommendations?

____ Does the communications instrument contain a section designed specifically to share with school board members educational articles gleaned from the superintendent's reading, as well as a section giving general information about the individual school district?

____ Does the communications instrument contain a calendar of school events which serve to encourage board members to attend and learn more about their school system?

____ Is the communciations instrument sent to the school board at least four days prior to the meeting?

____ Do all board members demonstrate that they have read and studied the material made available to them in this communications instrument?

The Design Of The Board Room

____ Does the room aid or hinder the board processes?

____ Does the room reflect tasteful decor and tone?

____ Is the room warm and friendly?

____ Is the furniture comfortable?

____ Is the school board table so designed that board members can see each other, and yet be seen by those who attend school board meetings?

____ Does the room provide for comfort for visitors?

____ Is the room well ventilated?

____ Are records, maps, reference books, copies of state school laws, samples of textbooks and other materials likely to be useful in the discussions, easily accessible?

____ Is a podium provided for those who wish to address the Board?

____ Is an agenda available for each visitor?

____ Are provisions made for an amplifier?

____ Are arrangements made to accommodate members of the press, television and radio?

____ Is every bo.rd member furnished with a notebook, and a place to store it at the table, containing such things as policy, budget and general information on the district?

____ Is writing material provided for each school board member?

____ Does each school board member have a name plate in front of him (or her)?

____ Are provisions made to tape-record the school board sessions?

The School Board Meetings

____ Do meetings begin on time?

____ Does the chairman set a positive and businesslike tone for the meeting?

____ Does the chairman establish limits for discussion and keep discussions to one topic at a time?

____ Is the chairman fair and impartial?

____ Are provisions made for citizens to speak at an appropriate time during the meeting?

____ Are they listened to attentively and with respect?

____ Is there a policy relative to citizens addressing the board of education with provisions covering the following: (a) their place on the agenda, (b) the time allotted for such presentations, (c) the information that each is to give to the board, such as name, address and topic of his statement?

____ Are instructions and information about addressing the school board written and available for visitors to see at the time of each school board session?

____ Is action taken only after recommendation has been received from the superintendent of schools and considered by the board of education as a whole?

____ Does the board of education operate as a committee-of-the-whole and without standing committees?

____ Does the board of education attorney attend meetings only upon request of the board and/or superintendent of schools?

____ Are executive sessions kept to a minimum and held in accordance with the statutes?

Handling Publicity On Board Meetings

____ If a reporter attends your meetings, is time set aside prior to the meeting so that he receives a briefing of what is to come up at the school board meeting?

____ If a reporter does not attend the meetings, are provisions made for sending information on each school board meeting to the local media?

____ Does the superintendent of schools work closely with the reporter, his editor and publisher in keeping them up-to-date on what is going on in the local school system?

The Superintendent's Conduct At Board Meetings

____ Does the superintendent provide a time prior to the board meeting for sufficient rest so he will be relaxed?

____ Does the superintendent know how to advise without dominating?

____ Does the superintendent of schools know when to retreat and regroup?

____ Does the superintendent of schools know how to handle unexpected questions?

The School Board Members' Conduct At Board Meetings

____ Is there an absence of obvious factions on the board?

____ Is there an indication of mutual respect between board members and between the board and the superintendent?

____ Does each board member show that he has done his homework relative to agenda items that are to be brought up at the school board meeting?

____ Does the board devote its time to major issues and policy discussion and avoid details and administrative involvement?

____ Is split voting held to a minimum and most questions decided by unanimous vote?

____ Except for questions and answers at designated times, do board members refrain from engaging in conversation and discussion with members of the audience?

____ Once a vote is taken and a decision made, does the conclusion become "our" decision and receive the unanimous support of all board members?

Follow-Up After The Meeting

____ Is a written summary of the actions taken at the board meeting distributed to all school personnel as soon as possible (no later than 12 hours after the school board meeting)?

____ Does the administrative staff follow up immediately on all actions needed as a result of the meeting?

____ Does the superintendent assign definite responsibility and time limits for follow-up action by appropriate members of the staff?

____ Immediately after the conclusion of one board meeting, does planning begin for the next?

____ Is provision made immediately following the school board meeting for board members to go to another area for what might be a midnight snack so that all involved will be given an opportunity to end the activities of the evening on a positive note?

The Philosophy, Goals, Objectives And Evaluation Of The School System

____ Is at least one information session each year set aside, in a retreat setting, for the sole purpose of planning for the future of the school district? Such a meeting is sometimes referred to as a philosophy session.

____ During the philosophy session is time set aside for an evaluation of the previous year's philosophy as it relates to the performance of individuals within the school system, the superintendent of schools and the board of education, individually and collectively?

____ Does this philosophy session serve as a guideline for the school staff and the school budget for the coming year and/or years ahead?

WHO SHOULD MAKE THESE DECISIONS – THE BOARD OR THE SUPERINTENDENT?

WARNING: This exercise – if taken at a school board meeting – may cause spirited debate. Good! A group discussion about the decision-making situations listed below may contribute to a clearer understanding of the board's proper role and the superintendent's. According to standard theory, it is the board's job to make the policy decisions; it is the superintendent's job to make the administrative decisions. But which is which? You decide. Take pencil in hand, mark your responses, and compare your judgment with that of your colleagues – and the EPS staff, whose comments appear in the upside-down "answer" key. As you make your choices, bear in mind that some "superintendent decisions" may be properly delegated by him to the staff members such as principals, the school business manager, curriculum director, etc.

		Primarily the board's decision	Primarily the supt's decision
1.	It's six o'clock in the morning. It's not snowing yet, but the weather bureau forecasts a blizzard before noon. Someone must decide whether or not to cancel school sessions today. Who should decide?	___	___
2.	Overcrowding at central school forces this decision: Go on double sessions or lease portable classrooms. Whose decision?		
3.	Next year at the high school there will be only one class in Latin IV. Who should decide as to whether this course will be assigned to Teacher Breen or Teacher Long?	___	___
4.	A request has come in from station WXYZ-TV to videotape board meetings for its news programs. Who should decide?	___	___
5.	A new shopping center has created a traffic hazard at the school bus stop at Third & Vine. Who should decide whether or not the bus stop should be changed to a less hazardous intersection?	___	___

		Primarily the board's decision	Primarily the supt's decision
6.	The board has a policy permitting the use of school facilities by nonprofit community groups on evenings and on weekends. A nonprofit pacifist organization submits a routine application for the use of the auditorium to stage a one-night peace rally. Who should decide on this application?	___	___
7.	A group of irate parents, angered by an article in **Newsweek** about the "rights" of homosexuals, demands that this magazine be banned from the school library. Who should decide whether to ban or not to ban **Newsweek**?	___	___
8.	Should smoking be allowed by students on school property during the school day? Whose decision?	___	___
9.	The local Ford dealer offers – with no strings attached – the free use of a '71 Mustang for use by the driver training class. Who should decide whether or not to accept this offer?	___	___
10.	Local teachers' association asks permission to use the Central Office mimeograph machine to produce a weekly newsletter for its members. Who should decide whether or not to grant this request?	___	___

QUIZ COMMENTS (Don't peek until you do quiz.)

In our opinion, the board should have a written policy covering all **ten** issues. If that were the case, the superintendent could be free to act on his own discretion regarding 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10. These situations all seem to call for administrative action based on previously adopted policy.

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